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SUBJECT: WEEKLY MEDIA WRAP-UP: IRAQ AND NEW STRATEGY; AMERICAN AIR STRIKES IN SOMALIA; RUSSIANS TURN OFF OIL SUPPLY / EU ENERGY POLICY. JANUARY 12, 2007.

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Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) Speculation as to President Bush's new strategy for Iraq, including the replacement of Generals George Casey and John Abizaid, began to gain momentum in the French media this week. Before the President's address to the nation, commentators analyzed the possible consequences of sending new troops to Iraq. Right and left-leaning media agreed that the White House has no other option and pointed to President Bush's alleged "refusal to acknowledge that the war is already lost." Following the January 10 speech, left-wing Liberation and left-of-center Le Monde devoted their headlines and editorials to Iraq. For Le Monde, the American President is "staying the course in spite of everyone and everything." The January 8 air raids in Somalia received broad coverage this week and commentators noted that the U.S. has not intervened in the Horn of Africa since the "fiasco of the 1990s" (left-of-center Le Monde) and that the bombings to flush out al Qaida activists "smacked of revenge" (regional daily Ouest France). Other issues that vied for front pages this week were the oil war with Russia and the common policy adopted by the EU 27 on energy. End Summary.

IRAQ: A NEW STRATEGY AND ADDRESS TO THE NATION

12. (SBU) On January 5, the absence of any formal announcement in Washington concerning the replacement of Generals George Casey and John Abizaid as well as the nomination of Ambassador Khalilzad to the UN and his eventual replacement in Iraq by Ambassador Ryan Crocker did not stop leading morning radio news programs on Europe 1 and RTL from welcoming the changes as a "new step" in U.S. foreign policy with regard to the conflict in Iraq.

13. (SBU) In advance of the President's speech, the editorial in right-of-center Le Figaro by Yves Threard on January 8 surmised that, "In spite of the defeat of the Republicans during the midterm elections, in spite of the Baker Hamilton Report, in spite of a drop in approval ratings and widespread criticism on the part of the international community, the American president remains steadfast in his intention to continue 'his war' in Iraq... But does he really have a choice? Accepting defeat in Iraq... would have disastrous consequences on the U.S. and world stability... Everyone knows that, as troublesome as the Iraqi conflict is for Washington, the real challenge for the U.S. and for Europe is to win the tug-of-war with

Tehran. To give up in Iraq would be tantamount to losing the first battle with Iran."

¶13. (SBU) Also on January 8, Catholic *La Croix*'s correspondent Gilles Biassette commented that "The announcement to send new troops to Iraq will in essence go against the recommendations of the Baker Hamilton Report... and send a mixed signal to the Iraqi authorities that are being criticized by Washington for not tackling the security issue themselves."

¶14. (SBU) Popular right-of-center daily *Le Parisien*'s Washington correspondent Thomas Canteloube warned on January 10 that "President Bush is wagering everything on the new strategy for Iraq... And although the White House is not presenting the President's address under this angle, most analysts agree that Bush is playing his last cards."

¶15. (SBU) The day after the President's address to the nation (January 11), left-wing *Liberation*'s editorial by Gerard Dupuy ironically noted that "George W. Bush has decided that once and for all this war is too serious of an affair to be left in the hands of the military..." Dupuy added that troop reinforcements may "succeed in bringing about some respite in Baghdad but cannot bring about stability for the Iraqi government... The defeat that Bush refuses to acknowledge is first and foremost political. The Iraqi adventure had two objectives: to do away with weapons of mass destruction and to establish democracy. The latter is as improbable as the former were impossible to find."

¶16. (SBU) Right-of-center *Le Figaro*'s editorial by Pierre Roussel on January 11 entitled "Bush's Last Chance" suggested that "some 20,000 soldiers more will not change the situation. Everyone agrees on this point and many see Bush's new strategy for Iraq as doomed to fail... The objective, however, is not strictly military; it is also political and serves to buy time. The disarray in Iraq is such that the White House has no other choice. Even partial troop withdrawal would have been tantamount to admitting defeat and that

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everything that has been done up to now has been for naught... Taking control of a city of five million where civil war is already well under way will be costly for the American contingent... The symbolic stakes of the battle for Baghdad are crucial for Iraq ... and for the region as a whole... For the past six months, George Bush no longer had a strategy for Iraq... This is the last chance for him to save his presidency."

¶17. (SBU) State-run France Inter radio commentator Bernard Guetta likened sending additional troops to Iraq to putting on a "Band-aid" during his morning commentary on January 11: "In what George Bush just said to the American people one thing is unfortunately undeniably true: A defeat in Iraq would be a disaster for the U.S. ... A victory for the Islamists that would plunge the entire Middle East into a regional conflict that would pose an international threat... All of these dangers ... are the direct consequence of the folly of intervening in Iraq in the first place... Can a President whose shameful blindness led to this tragic situation be capable of finding a solution to it? The answer is obviously 'no,' but since he is in office for another two years his solution prevails... By refusing to implement the recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton Report, Bush is simply pushing back and complicating what the U.S. will ultimately have to face up to."

¶18. (SBU) Regional editorialists in *Ouest France* and *La Presse de la Manche* painted a bleak picture in the January 11 editions of the dailies. Joseph Limagne in *Ouest France* hypothesized that "not even the Democrats, who initially approved of an intervention against Saddam Hussein, have any better idea than George W. Bush of how to withdraw the troops from Iraq. But in any event, America cannot simply turn on its heels and go, washing its hands of the disaster it triggered." *La Presse de la Manche*'s editorialist Jean Levallois wrote that while "it is very difficult to acknowledge that one has made mistakes in front of the whole world, it is especially challenging to admit to mistakes while continuing to want to be right... George W. Bush has not begun to assess the scope of his own failure. He continues to believe that he will be able to turn

the situation around because he is the strongest and will not capitulate. Given these conditions, how many more victims will there be?"

¶19. (SBU) The unsigned editorial in the January 12 left-of-center *Le Monde* suggested that "if this last-chance strategy bears fruit, Mr. Bush will have his place in History as the man who stood firm in the 'war on terrorism.' If, however, it becomes another in a series of failures, President Bush will more prosaically pass the Iraqi torch to his successor."

AMERICAN AIR STRIKES IN SOMALIA

¶10. (SBU) Left-of-center *Le Monde*'s front page on January 10 highlighted that the American air raid "is the first American foray into Somalia since the fiasco in the 90s." For regional *Ouest France*'s editorialist Joseph Limage, the American strikes "smack of revenge... It is time for Washington to come to terms with the limitations of the war it has waged on terrorism... It will only lead to the multiplication of more pockets of Jihadists if nothing is done to address the problems of poverty, insecurity and lack of hope for the future from which it stems."

¶11. (SBU) Also on January 10, the front page of right-of-center *Le Figaro* reported the air strikes in Somalia underscoring that they "mark the return of the U.S. in a country where it had not intervened since 1992 and 1994... This time," *Le Figaro* noted, "it is no longer a question of indirect support for a regional ally: Ethiopia. The U.S. directly intervened in the Somali conflict... The U.S. embassy in Nairobi has issued a warning about possible terrorist attacks in East Africa."

¶12. (SBU) Right-of-center *Le Figaro*'s January 11 edition reported "confusion concerning the new American raids in Somalia" and relayed the French Foreign Affairs Ministry statement expressing "concern" about an intervention that "complicates the situation in Somalia and could increase tensions..." Popular right-of-center *Le Parisien*'s Catherine Tardrew underscored that today "Bush is taking on Somalia." "After Iraq, Washington is opening a new front. In Africa this time... The Americans are already bogged down in Iraq, by intervening in Somalia it is the entire horn of Africa that risks being destabilized."

RUSSIANS 'TURN OFF OIL SUPPLY' -- EU ENERGY POLICY

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¶13. (SBU) The headline story in left-of-center *Le Monde* on January 10, emphasized that the 27 were "having difficulty finding a common policy with regard to the oil supply." The unsigned editorial in the daily put forward, "First it was gas, now it is oil... Energy is Russia's principal weapon in its quest to regain the political power to which it aspires since Vladimir Putin took office."

¶14. (SBU) For right-of-center *Le Figaro* on January 10, "friction is intense between Putin and Europe." An op-ed in business daily *Les Echos* by the correspondent in Brussels Karl de Meyer, speculated that perhaps the energy issue "will provide the perfect opportunity for Europe to get a new boost." Left-wing *Liberation* devoted its headline to the European "Plan to fight climate change" with the editorial noting that "the atmosphere is getting warmer but the relationship with Russia is getting cooler and the EU is as always lukewarm... The EU Commission is calling for more growth and less CO2. We can but applaud, even if it seems unlikely to have growth that does not depend on energy...."

STAPLETON